

## Chairman's Report 2023/24

The 2023-24 season was one of the busiest the club have had in many years. Over 250 adult matches were played and the club provided over 3000 hours of hockey to hundreds of junior players. The juniors because their success this year has been a triumph of will; a few years ago Ipswich had a relatively small junior presence with other local clubs being the dominant force. Today that has changed and the club now have over 250 juniors registered; to give context the junior section has grown by over 100 members in one season. Junior training has been run entirely by volunteers thanks must go everyone who has helped on cold mornings and long away trips. Highlights were the boys U16s and U14s who had tremendous success playing in the tier 1 national finals and the boys and girls U12s and U10s of whom 3 of 4 teams were Suffolk county winners and all represented Suffolk at the East Finals.

In the adult section following last year's successes with 5 promotions the club knew it would be a challenge, not least helped by a number of players departing to university or some senior players being unavailable this year. However, despite relegations the membership impressed throughout the season, rising to challenges, playing against internationals in many matches at 1<sup>st</sup> XI level and the club also managed to secure one promotion this year. The club also had a new XI this season, a men's 5<sup>th</sup> XI, and overall the club played more matches than in any recent season – it is certainly growing.

The Women's 3s faced a tough step up this season and despite fighting hard went down. The Men's 3s won their league comprehensively, congratulations, and the Men's 4s and 5s had solid seasons, finishing well. The Women's 2s cemented their place in East England Division 1 and the Women's 4s and 5s had good seasons despite some very tough opposition. The Men's section will also be welcoming a 6<sup>th</sup> XI next year, an academy team for up and coming youngsters – this augurs well and the club hopes the women may be in a position to do something similar as their juniors come through in 2025.

The Men's and Women's 1<sup>st</sup> XIs were both relegated from the England Hockey East Conference and will play in East England Premier League next season. A significant challenge for the respective 1<sup>st</sup> XIs was England hockey's decision, despite an appeal, to play Ipswich in the East conference. The Midlands Conference with local rivals Magpies and Norwich would have been much more suitable, economical and frankly logical. The club feel England Hockey let East Anglian down hockey last season and as guardians of the game their approach was myopic especially as this coming season they have now moved to the wholly logical structure Ipswich requested.

Elsewhere, the Men's 2s and Women's 3s were relegated this season following promotions, the Men's 2s fell foul to an illogical structure that relegated 1/3 of the their league – to compound matters they were relegated with 10 wins and 2 draws from 22 games, a 45% win rate.

The indoor seasons were successful with the Men competing again at National Level and the Women at regional. Next season the club hope to work with local schools and to play more indoor hockey at a junior level beginning with representation at the Derby arena in May for all ages, U10s upwards.

Veterans hockey was also a highlight this year, the women exited early following a tough 1<sup>st</sup> round draw but the Men's over 40s made it all the way to the National Semi-Finals, losing out to eventual winners.

From a social perspective, the club has come a long way – successful socials, excellent attendance, exceptional bar takings and junior Sundays are helping us transform from being an average club to a good one with regards to socials. This change has been helped significantly by the investment in improving the bar and getting beer available on tap.

Sponsorship again this year from SEVEN group was critical and their investment continues to help Ipswich achieve on and off the pitch. From a financial perspective, the hockey club is in the black, generating good solid income with a growing membership and growing revenues. In order for this to continue the club simply must seek to raise more investment and this will be a priority for next season.

The major frustration across the season for the membership has been the issues with car park which has been in an unacceptable state for a club of our size – this will require significant efforts to rectify over the summer period. The partnership with ISC has improved immeasurably yet both parties acknowledge there is a way to go to ensure a seamless relationship that benefits all and makes best use of resources at ISC and at the Hockey Club.

Overall, the club is arriving at a point where it will be in enviable position to be able to take bold decisions. Membership is up, teams are growing, the social scene is thriving and our juniors are in a fantastic position. The club is at a crossroads and needs to collectively decide the path it wishes to take – a good solid amateur club occasionally pushing into EHL or a professional powerhouse of a club, growing adult and junior teams each year with facilities to envy. Nearly every area of the club needs genuine professionalization should the club wish to continue on the path it is on and next season that needs to start with facilities and sponsorship. If the club wishes to take the ambition pathway then a longer term plan to upgrade Northgate's pitch to offer 2 pitches is vital. Likewise reaching an agreement on the car park development and plans around using the Tuddenham Road facility to generate income and get as many people playing sport as possible are needed, for example an indoor centre which would be transformative and generate significant income for all. Decisions need to be made soon in order to capitalise on what has been a very successful few years for Ipswich Hockey Club.

Thank you to everyone, members, players, committee, coaches, ISC, friends and family who have supported us over the 2023-24 season.

James Ward, Chairman